DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 364 446 SO 023 269

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TITLE Education for Justice, Environmental Care and Cultural Solidarity: A Holistic Conception of Peace Education. Peace Education Miniprints No. 46.
INSTITUTION Lund Univ. (Sweden). Malmo School of Education.
REPORT NO ISSN-1101-6418
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 18p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Foreign Countries; International Education; *Interviews; *Peace; *Role of Education; Secondary Education; *Teacher Attitudes; War
IDENTIFIERS *Peace Education

ABSTRACT

The project group "Preparedness for Peace" at the Malmo School of Education in Sweden studies ways of helping children and young people to deal constructively with questions of peace and war. As part of this work, experts with special interest and competence in areas related to peace education are interviewed. This publication explores the views to Toh Swee-Hin of the University of Alberta, Canada. A Malaysian by nationality, Toh Swee-Hin has worked with peace and development educators in many countries, including Australia, the Philippines, and Canada. He is a prolific writer and supervised a number of theses and dissertations in the fields of peace and development education. (Author)

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EDUCATION FOR JUSTICE, ENVIRONMENTAL CARE AND CULTURAL SOLIDARITY: A HOLISTIC CONCEPTION OF PEACE EDUCATION

Toh Swee-Hin
and
The Project "Preparedness for Peace"

The project group "Preparedness for Peace" at the Malmö School of Education in Sweden studies ways of helping children and young people to deal constructively with questions of peace and war. As part of this work, experts with special interest and competence in areas related to peace education are interviewed.

This publication explores the views of Toh Swee-Hin, University of Alberta, Canada. A Malaysian by nationality, Toh Swee-Hin has had the opportunity to work with peace and development educators in many countries, especially in Australia, in the Philippines, and in Canada. He has been a prolific writer and supervised a number of theses and dissertations in the fields of peace and development education. – Interviewer: Åke Bjerstedt.

PEACE EDUCATION:
A CONVERSATION WITH TOH SWEE-HIN, CANADA

1.

ÅB: As an introduction, could you say a few words about yourself and your interest in the field of "peace education"?

ST: I am Toh Swee-Hin. I put my family name Toh first, because I am a Chinese, and that sometimes causes some confusion. Born and raised in Malaysia, I had elementary and high school education there until I received a scholarship to study science and education in Australia. Upon returning to Malaysia, I worked as a science teacher in high school for a few years before deciding to pursue graduate studies in education at the University of Alberta in Canada. Initially, I specialized in the field educational administration, because I had some ideas of going back and try to change the Malaysian educational system "from the top down". Thus, my Masters degree focused on educational planning. However, as further studies exposed me to courses on development issues, I realized that a significant amount of administrative theorizing is oriented in the technocratic paradigm. This increasingly led me away from educational administration to educational foundations including sociological, political and cultural issues in education. So I finished my doctoral studies in the area now referred to as development education.

In the seventies in Canada, development education really grew as a movement. I was also actively involved in the anti-apartheid movement. My own doctoral study examined a U.S.-based think tank that was trying to influence especially American foreign policy. I did a critique of this think tank, its ideology and paradigm of development.

In short, I started in peace education from development and social justice dimensions, and it was only when I began to teach in Australia that my conception of peace education broadened to include the other issues that we now see as part of a holistic conception of peace education. As I developed my courses at the University of New England in Australia, even what I called development education already had issues of human rights, environmental concerns and cultural solidarity as components.

The courses were partly at the undergraduate level for people who would become teachers (in the hope that they would infuse their teaching, whatever the subject, with peace principles and peace pedagogy), but partly also at the graduate level, where practising teachers came in and did part-time studies with me as they were teaching. They did thesis research related especially to how they would be able to teach about peace and development in their own

classrooms. I have been doing that since 1980.

Only recently I have moved to the University of Alberta, Canada, this time to develop programs in what we call global education at the moment. (For me it is the same as peace education.) It's a movement that Canadian teachers through their professional associations, in almost all the provinces have taken up. These provincial Global Education Projects are funded by the official aid agency of Canada, CIDA.

However, I would like to emphasize that my peace education involvement in the Philippines has been quite extensive. I have been going back there twice a year for the past six years working with my Filipino colleagues in peace education.

ÅB: How did it happen that you came to have that contact?

ST: It began in 1986 when I visited the country for the first time as part of my sabbatical leave. Through serving on the Board of Directors of the World Council for Curriculum and Instruction, I had met one of the Filipino educators, Virginia Floresca Cawagas. One of the activities that was arranged for me was to substitute for the Philippine Secretary of Education at a conference to launch a Peace Studies Center in Xavier University in the southern region. She was supposed to give a keynote address around the topic of peace education. I got some ideas together and presented a tentative version of a holistic framework on peace education at the conference. The response of the audience including Filipino teachers, administrators, and community citizens was very envouraging. From then on, I have collaborated with Virginia Floresca Cawagas and other peace educators in the Philippines in elaborating this holistic concept of peace education. In particular, we were able to make close contacts with Notre Dame University, a Catholic university on the southern island of Mindanao, in peace education. "Why don't you come over a period of time and join us in developing a graduate program in peace and development education", they suggested. So that has been happening in the past five years, and our Kyoto paper gives some details on the program and on the process of developing peace education at this university. (Editor's note: This Kyoto paper is now available as Peace Education Miniprint, No. 38.)

2.

ÅB: What do you think of first when you hear the words "peace education"?

ST: I must confess that initially, especially in the seventies in the Western countries, peace education was very much connected with the "disarmament movement" or the "peace movement", and I had that idea as well. However,

as I began to collaborate with Australian peace educators, people like Jen Burnley and Robin Burns for example, I shared their view that peace education should not be restricted to disarmament issues. I think that in Australia, over the last ten years, we have been able to establish a consensus about this. It is very rare nowadays, when people in Australia hear about peace education, that they would think that it is just about disarmament. Among teachers the holistic concept is very much the idea now.

This is true in the Philippines also. Development education has been around for some time, but some of that work has not been very holistic; others have worked with environmental issues, or with human rights issues. Our work in the Philippines has been to help some of those groups actually to see their connections. That has been our ambition in the workshops we arranged for people in NGOs (non-governmental organizations) so that their members could broaden their own conception of their task.

ÅB: When you think of the goals of peace education, would you include knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, behavior tendencies, or would you just think of some of these?

ST: We have a broad view also when thinking about the goals. When talking about knowledge, we do not just mean content, but also understanding based on theoretical analysis. But at the same time, all the academic understanding in the world will not change the world for the better, make it more peaceful, if we do not translate the understanding into action. We need to teach empowerment, the commitment that one has the responsibility to try to change the world, not only as individuals but particularly in collaboration with other people – joining hands with others to effect social action. For us, peace education involves not only the content but also the pedagogy, as well as the empowerment – in order to bring about transformation. We all as peace educators need to be able to stand in front of our students and in our conversations and dialogues with them confess: Look, I am not a saint, I don't claim to be especially peaceful, but I try as much as I can also to actively engage in peace action.

Another point that I want to clarify here is that peace action is not necessarily the same as easily visible actions in rallies or big demonstrations. I agree that these are often important in the process of making the world more peaceful. But for us in education, we have a particular responsibility in trying to change the way classrooms and schools are often structured. We cannot have social, political or economic peace in a world without also having a peaceful educational system. We need to transform the educational system structurally and organizationally. This is one of our tasks

as educators. This work is not as visible as protests in the streets, but it is equally action. I think it also means taking risks, because we may need to challenge power structures within education. We may need to challenge those who are in charge of administrative decision-making.

3.

ÅB: If you think back on your own school days, were there some aspects in your schooling that might be considered an attempt at "peace education"?

ST: In my early schooling in Malaysia there was not very much about the formal education system that I would see as promoting peace education. My assessment of it now is that much of it was structurally not peaceful. It was part of the British colonial and post-independence education, highly competitive and very examination-dominated. At that time I excelled in the science subjects. But now I would over all consider much of that curriculum, the content and the pedagogy, as quite unpeaceful. If there were some more peaceful influences, these were from single individuals. You might come across one or two teachers who really cared for their students, not just in an academic sense but more in terms of personal development and growth. But in general, my early days of schooling did not contain any peace education as I now conceptualize it.

4.

ÅB: Do you believe that schools in your country, as you know them today, contribute to a "peace education"? Since your experience covers several countries, you have to tell me what country you will talk about.

ST: Yes, I will answer that in two parts. I think first in terms of *"North"* countries, such as Australia and Canada, which in this respect are fairly similar. I think that especially in the eighties, there has been some progress made in this field through infusing the curriculum with a holistic concept of peace and peace pedagogy. We see more dialogue between teacher and learner and more emphasis on discussions related to militarization, human rights, justice and related topics. This is not true for most schools, but for some schools and some teachers. Certainly, it is very rare to find a school that is practising every aspect of these principles.

There is a political context to this, namely that we are now moving into times characterized by more conservative tendencies. This is true of both Australia and Canada. With more emphasis upon competition and a narrow technocratic set of criteria about "knowledge", teaching and learning about social awareness according to peace or global education will not be

considered quite as relevant. This makes it harder for peace education to progress than it was able in the eighties.

If instead I should talk about *"South"* countries, I only wish to deal with the Philippines. There are certainly attempts made by groups of educators in the peace education movement to change both curriculum and pedagogy in directions related to peace education. But it will be a slow process because of the resistance embodied in many vested interests towards the resolution of issues of justice or demilitarization or cultural solidarity for example. This is true even in institutions where justice should not be a problem, such as in Catholic schools. Church doctrines support justice, but you might very well find that some Catholic administrators are running their schools in quite an authoritarian manner. The curriculum can also be elitist in orientation.

5.

ÅB: Do you think it is at all possible for schools to contribute to a "peace education"? If so, what are some of the steps and measures to be taken that you think of first?

ST: Oh, definitely. Some of the concrete steps are to begin with the teachers themselves; they are the professionals; without teachers there would be no schools. The question to raise is how do we facilitate teachers to move into peace education? We should recognize that teachers may not personally be against peace education, but they may not have had any relevant training or socialization; they may lack skills and awareness to do it effectively. I believe that in general people, including teachers, have a predisposition to live in a more peaceful world. So what we need to do is to encourage processes of self-clarification on what this means in individual, societal, local and global terms and also to give them tools to work with these issues in the classroom. This calls for a lot of inservice work with teachers, where participatory workshops are needed rather than merely giving lectures. We need to engage teachers in dialogue and show them creative ways of doing peace education. That is how we have proceeded in our workshops in the Philippines. On the first day, the teachers may feel a bit strange. But by the third day, having gone through this participatory pedagogy, they feel much more confident. At a stage of self-discovery, they begin to see that peace education is relevant to them, that they can use this or that strategy themselves. So it is always possible. Another thing that is important is to convince administrators, because they are very often real obstacles. Teachers may be willing but can be discouraged by administrators. So we need to attend to people who make decisions.

ÅB: If you think about the steps and measures a teacher has to work with in a classroom in order to bring about peace education, what comes to your mind?

ST: One of the points we always raise with teachers in our workshops is the need to listen to their learners instead of just imposing ideas on them. We should always start from the ideas and feelings of our students, and then the teacher's role is to facilitate the broadering and deepening of the student's understanding. The teacher could later also question or challenge the students, suggesting ideas that they may not have considered before in order to better understand the wider realities around them. This step-by-step process is critical in my view for effective peace education in classrooms.

6.

ÅB: What would be some of the possible differences in peace education approaches among younger and older students in schools?

ST: Of course, one difference would be in terms of scope of knowledge, the amount of knowledge the students know in depth. I have heard some arguments saying that because students are young, they should not consider peace education topics at all; you should leave it till later. I and my Filipino friends in peace education do not agree. By postponing so-called "difficult" topics, we have lost an important opportunity to touch the inner beings of our students.

The area of justice would be an example. I think that from an early age we all learn about justice, just from our own personal experience: children know early what is fair and not fair. You do not need to have a university degree to know what is fair and not fair. We have to build upon those natural feelings that most normal human beings have and therefore not postpone topics of injustice. In development education a food game is often used in order to illustrate unfair distribution in the world society (a game in which a few children get a lot of good food, whereas other children in the classroom get little). This game can foster empathy and some understanding of power relations in the world. If such a food game can give younger children some early notion of justice/injustice in the world and how people feel about it, we then later on deepen their knowledge, for example, when they learn about the trade system at higher school levels.

So school education is in a sense like a system of building blocks. We need foundations in all issues. The area of racism and prejudice is another area that could be dealt with early. Values formation begins very early well before school starts, and educating for peace should not avoid con-

sciousness-raising and personal empowerment from the first day of school. We just have to be sensitive to the amount of knowledge that people can digest at different ages.

7.

ÅB: If you were an upper-secondary school teacher in a subject with which you are particularly familiar, how would you like to make the students more conscious of and more prepared for problems of peace, within that subject?

ST: We would start with an issue that is related to the students' daily lives. If we are dealing with the topic of world hunger, for example, it would be natural to start with the local supermarket or grocery store and the consumer products the students come across every day in their homes. Try to get them involved in creative activities within this topic where they can clearly see how their own everyday world relates to people in other countries.

In this process, we would certainly have the students carry out exercises which could evoke empathy. Through role playing, they can "step" into the shoes of the hungry and the oppressed. We would have them compose songs about human rights violations. And by promoting reflection and sharing on what we can do as individuals or citizens, this brings in empowerment.

We consistently question charity models in terms of personal aid. Charity does not get to the root problem. It is much more important for students in any country to be ready to question their government policies when these are not fair or democratic. If the world policies were more fair and democratic, then people would not need charity. There would be equitable production and distribution of resources and fair trade. We need to reach that stage of solidarity in peace education or else the educational process would not be holistic.

In Philippine peace education, empowerment is also encouraged in relation to environmental destruction in the students' own country or neighborhood. If there is a local factory that is polluting the river, for example, public and school campaigns can be initiated to stop this pollution.

8.

ÅB: In international debates, the terms "disarmament education" and "peace education" have been used, in addition to some other related terms ("global education", "education for international understanding" etc.). Do you have any comments and preferences as to this terminology?

ST: I personally prefer "peace education"; any expression that has "peace" in

it. I think "peace" is a very crucial word in the human vocabulary. I do not think the term peace should be left to the conservative forces of the world who mean war when they talk about "peace". But I can understand why, in some situations, some terms like "global education" or "international understanding" may have to be used in order to make progress in implementing peace education. So at a practical level it doesn't matter so much which term you use. But one has to be aware, when using "global education", that there are conservative paradigms of "global education" which are quite different from the peace education perspective. I have seen some curriculum materials, made in the name of "global education", which embody assumptions contrary to the peace paradigm.

9.

ÅB: In many countries, questions related to disarmament and peace are highly controversial. Would you anticipate any difficulties, for example with parents or other members of the community, when introducing peace education in schools? If so, what kind of difficulties? Do you see any way out of such problems?

ST: I think there are difficulties in both North and South, certainly in North countries. Some issues like disarmament are often regarded as controversial. This may be so because people with anti-peace-education views have carried out an effective propaganda campaign. In Australia, for example, in the early eighties the conservatives had a vigorous anti-peace-education campaign. If they had not done so, parents in general might be less suspicious about peace education. So I think we can always anticipate some difficulties.

But a more important question is how we deal with those, and I think we can think of a number of ways. One is to openly explain to parents and members of the community our purposes. We are not trying to "indoctrinate" their children into peace activists although this does not imply a value-free or neutral orientation to societal or global issues and problems. We are concerned about critical understanding, and good education means to develop critical thinking. In peace education we should, on any issue, foster critical understanding of different points of view. That does not mean that we therefore as teachers are neutral. As peace educators our views come out any way and the processes of empowerment help catalyze students to consider personal action for transformation. But we will not say to the student, "You better believe this, or else I will fail you". We need to trust our students as human beings to hopefully opt for the peaceful paradigm. If

they don't, we have not done a good enough job. So that's one way to get out of the problem.

Secondly, we should avoid language which colours the discussion. For example, in the Philippines, over the past few decades there has been a strong ideology of anti-communism as well as an ongoing revolutionary movement based on armed struggle. Therefore, we need to avoid any language in our peace education that inadvertently colours us as being "leftist". There is no reason why you cannot talk about justice without using the jargon of Marxism-Leninism, for example. We can talk about the role of powerful industrialized states in maintaining North-South inequalities without necessarily saying "imperialism". So how we use language is very important, as a way to avoid being bogged down by preconceptions and to unnecessarily trigger resistance within our listeners. That is why we were able do a workshop with soldiers. In the beginning, they showed some suspicion: were we subversives in disguise? But at the end I think they listened with some openness to our critique of structural violence, militarization, human rights and other issues of peacelessness in the Philippines. We encouraged them to think critically, a process hitherto denied by their training and socialization.

10.

ÅB: What needs to be done in teacher training in order to prepare future teachers more adequately for the area of "peace education"?

ST: I have dealt with some aspects of this question already. One additional point would be to stress that there is a need to make available resources that teachers can use effectively. Usually the best resources are those that have involved teachers in producing the materials. Such materials takes into account the difficulties in teaching various topics and draws on the skills of the practitioner. But another underpinning challenge lies in the paradigm held by teacher educators themselves – are they critically aware of the problems of peace, and most importantly, do they have a commitment to building a peaceful world?

11.

ÅB: In many schools, the students represent a variety of nationalities and cultural backgrounds. To what extent would it be possible to use this fact as an aid in education for peace? Would you expect some difficulties in doing so?

ST: I think it is not just an aid; it is part and parcel of education for peace. A

significant problem of unpeacefulness today is that we do not recognize that we can have unity in diversity. We need to respect the diversity. If you do have this kind of multi-cultural background in your school, this is of course an aid in training for respect of diversity of culture. It is important to give a voice to groups who have been marginalized to date. Marginalized groups (like the non-whites in some countries) have suffered from discrimination for a long time, and from an early age members of such groups begin to feel ashamed of their own cultures. So it is very important to carry out what we call cultural solidarity education. But equally in school contexts which may not reflect cultural diversity, it is crucial to promote values and attitudes of intercultural understanding among members of the dominant groups in society.

ÅB: Do you see any difficulties in this work?

ST: Yes, it's certainly a particularly difficult aspect of education for peace, because we are dealing with cultural sensitivities. We have to be prepared for the fact that in some cultures there are some aspects of the culture that are not particularly peaceful. This may, for example, be some aspects related to the place of women in the culture. Just because this is part of the culture, it should not be a taboo to discuss that or to stimulate changes. So the important question is: how do we do this in a healthy and constructive way? One essential term here is "critical respect". We should be *respectful* to other cultures in the sense that we deeply listen to the views and ideas of different cultures in order to understand their complexities and contextual realities. But we should also be *critical* in the sense that not all aspects of a culture are necessarily immutable. This is facilitated by the fact that members of the marginalized groups are beginning to speak up for themselves. In patriarchical societies, for example, women themselves are now more and more speaking up, trying to change the relationships between men and women to be more equitable, without destroying the culture.

Cultures can become more peaceful without undermining their integrity. A culture is not like a museum; cultures change all the time; and unpeaceful aspects of cultures can and should be left behind. Most importantly, education for cultural solidarity encourages us all to share our "wisdoms".

12.

ÅB: Sometimes the term "global survival" is used to refer to an area dealing both with the risks of nuclear war and with the risks of far-reaching environmental damage through pollution and overuse of resources. How do you look upon dealing with these two categories of risks together in school?

Do you have any suggestions as to how the teacher could approach the problem area of environmental damage?

ST: I think I would answer that by saying that whichever topic you choose to raise first, you need to try to connect it to the other. So if you take up nuclear war, you bring up the risks for the environment. Peace education should be holistic about issues. When you deal with environmental damage, for example, it is important to point out that this is connected to the justice in the world. Justice of the world is also connected to the militarization of the world. So I feel it is very natural to go back and forth between the two areas. In fact, it is my criticism of some of the environmental education that is carried out that it treats this topic in too limited a way. This education sometimes focuses upon specific questions like saving whales without recognizing related issues of a political and economic character. I think that increasingly, NGOs specializing in environment are recognizing the urgent need to avoid dealing with these problems in a fragmented way. In our peace education work in the Philippines, NGO colleagues have affirmed the relevance of a holistic framework for educating for justice, environmental care, and cultural solidarity.

13.

ÅB: Is there anything else that you would like to add about the school and peace education?

ST: I might perhaps add some notes on two points. The *first* issue deals with rethinking the very basis of our existence. That may sound philosophical. But I think that peace education is, in fact, about what it means to live as a human being in the world today. It is therefore a spiritual question and an ethical question. I think that peace educators should have that broad perspective of how we view each other as human beings. As peace educators we deal with many matters, such as with political questions, but we should not forget that existential and spiritual perspective.

The *second* point I want to mention is one of hope. As we attempt to educate for peace, we have to remain hopeful. There have been occasions when I have thought about the considerable time and energy devoted to these issues and about the fact that external progress so far seems rather small. So many people still prefer to think in terms of war and violence or are "contented" with personal attainment of material or other individualistic goals. But we have to see this work in a long perspective as work-in-progress in which one's contributions are an additional drop to a slowly growing pool of commitment worldwide. The seeds of peace education of

today may hopefully flower some time in the next century.

Some Notes on the Interviewee

Toh Swee-Hin, Ph.D., teaches in the fields of Third World education, peace education, and development education. A Malaysian by nationality, he has had the opportunity to work with peace and development educators in many countries, especially in Australia, in the Philippines, and in Canada. His present office address is: Dept. of Educational Foundations, 5-109 Education North, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, T6G 2G5, Canada.

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"Peace Education Miniprints" are published and distributed by the R&D Group "Preparedness for Peace" (address: School of Education, Box 23501, S-200 45 Malmö, Sweden).

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ISSN 1101-6418

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